

# Understand Dominican Republic

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Amid the citizenship controversy, livable wage issues and endemic corruption, how is the average Dominican coping?

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High mountains, fertile valleys and long coastline provide diversity to the second-largest island in the Caribbean.

# Dominican Republic Today

Young and old alike groan equally about endemic corruption and lack of opportunities, and with a past filled by strong-man dictators and corrupt politicians, the average Dominican has learned to live through hardships, and approaches the present with a healthy skepticism. Despite this, there's a general equanimity, or at the very least an ability to appreciate the good things in life: family, togetherness, music and laughter.

## Best on Film

**La Hija Natural** (Love Child) A teenager's anguished attempt to find and get to know her estranged father. Dominican entry for Best Foreign Film at 2011 Academy Awards.

**Sugar** Story of a Dominican baseball prospect's journey to minor leagues in middle America.

**Ladrones a Domicilio** (Robbers of the House) A political satire and slapstick comedy involving a robbery and kidnapping, and corruption in everyday life.

## Best in Print

**Dead Man in Paradise** Canadian journalist JB Mackinnon, the nephew of a priest murdered during the Trujillo regime, tries to piece together the unsolved crime.

**Fiesta del Chivo** (Feast of the Goat) Peruvian novelist Mario Vargas Llosa's imaginative telling of dictator Rafael Trujillo's final days.

**The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao** Junot Díaz's inventive story of a self-professed Dominican nerd in New Jersey and the tragic history of his family in the DR.

**The Farming of Bones** Edwidge Danticat's novel movingly recreates the events around the 1937 massacre of Haitians in the DR.

## The Mood

Most Dominicans would consider themselves religious and, while a deeply Catholic country, few attend Mass regularly. Evangelical Protestant Christianity attracts adherents with dramatic faith healings, fiery sermons and exorcisms. An underlying mix of popular legends, folk superstitions, syncretic African rituals and Vodou spiritualism, in part introduced by Haitian immigrants and their descendants, are alive and well, though less visible.

Reformists took heart in Leonel Fernández' decision not to pursue constitutional changes that would have allowed him to run for a fourth presidential term in 2012. Instead, Danilo Medina, an economist from the PLD (*Partido Liberación Dominicana*) and former chief-of-staff for Fernández, narrowly won with 51% of the vote over former president Mejía, the leader of the PRD (*Partido Revolucionario Dominicana*), the main opposition party. In the immediate aftermath, Mejía accused the PLD of vote-rigging. Since then, Medina has been credited with a more populist tone than his predecessor, in part because of 'listening tours' he's taken through rural regions.

## The Other Half

Many Dominicans still refer angrily to the Haitian occupation of their country over 160 years ago. Haitians are typically blamed for overburdened schools, insufficient healthcare and rising crime rates, especially guns, drugs and prostitution, and for taking Dominican jobs. Haitians continue migrating to the Dominican Republic (DR) in large numbers to work on the vast sugar plantations or in construction, risking violence, discrimination, poor living conditions and lack of legal protections; most workers on sugarcane plantations only have work during the *zafra*, the four- to six-month harvest period. One of the most reflexively-held prejudices across all strata of society is the assumption that the lighter the skin the higher the class and vice versa.